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Implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conferences on Human Settlements and on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

Summary of the high-level meeting on the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the positioning of UN-Habitat in this regard

Note by the President of the General Assembly

I. Introduction

1. In accordance with paragraph 173 of the New Urban Agenda (General Assembly resolution 71/256), the President of the General Assembly convened a two-day high-level meeting of the Assembly at United Nations Headquarters on 5 and 6 September 2017 to discuss the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the positioning of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) in this regard.

2. The meeting brought together representatives from national and local governments, including 6 ministers and vice-ministers and 13 mayors from around the world. A significant number of Executive Directors and Deputy Executive Directors of United Nations entities participated and spoke at the meeting. Representatives of civil society and the private sector also actively participated.

3. The meeting consisted of an opening segment, four interactive panel discussions, one plenary debate and a closing session. During the plenary debate, the participants considered best practices, success stories and recommendations contained in the report of the High-level Independent Panel to Assess and Enhance the Effectiveness of UN-Habitat.

4. The meeting included four interactive panel discussions on the following themes:

> *Panel 1*: The positioning of UN-Habitat in the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda: the normative and operational mandate of UN-Habitat and its work with governments and stakeholders

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Panel 2: The positioning of UN-Habitat in the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda: the governance structure and financial capability of UN-Habitat

Panel 3: Implementing the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals: the role of the United Nations system

Panel 4: Implementing the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals: the role of multi-stakeholder collaboration

5. The participants had before them a note by the Secretary-General on the report of the High-level Independent Panel to Assess and Enhance the Effectiveness of UN-Habitat (A/71/1006).

II. Opening segment

6. On 5 September, the President of the General Assembly opened the high-level meeting. During the opening segment, statements were also made by the Deputy Secretary-General and the Executive Director of UN-Habitat.

7. The President of the General Assembly welcomed the participants and noted the importance of the discussions over the two days, given the unprecedented rate of urbanization and its attendant challenges. He welcomed the adoption of the New Urban Agenda and said that, in order to effectively implement the Agenda, the international community should seize the opportunities presented by urbanization, strengthen partnerships, raise awareness of the New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Agenda and ensure that the United Nations system, in particular UN-Habitat, was strongly positioned to support their implementation.

8. The Deputy Secretary-General thanked the High-level Independent Panel for its recommendations and said the Secretary-General had taken note of the recommendations and would develop a concrete strategy to ensure that UN-Habitat was fit for purpose. She emphasized the importance of cities in achieving sustainable urban development and stated that, in this context, UN-Habitat must play a leading role in ensuring that urban expertise was strong across all the United Nations entities, and stressed the need for coherence and collaboration in United Nations urban work. She expressed support for the Panel's recommendation that the UN-Habitat regional offices be better aligned with the regional commissions and that UN-Habitat must focus both on leaving no one behind and on a territorial approach. While recognizing that the United Nations was currently not fit for the purpose, she emphasized the need for the United Nations to lead on urban issues and for UN-Habitat to take a leading role in the United Nations system. In conclusion, she expressed her expectation that the meeting would lead to concrete recommendations and consensus towards a new pathway for sustainable urbanization and that the United Nations system and UN-Habitat would successfully lead the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

9. The Executive Director of UN-Habitat thanked the members of the Panel for their work and deemed their report useful in strengthening UN-Habitat. He noted that the meeting was an occasion for consensus among the stakeholders and stressed the need for political commitment and technical and professional expertise in order to implement the New Urban Agenda. He said that UN-Habitat had already undergone reform resulting in a more focused, leaner and strategic programme that should better serve constituencies around the world and emphasized the need for increased financial stability in order to strengthen UN-Habitat. He said that a strengthened UN-Habitat would contribute to addressing the challenges of twenty-first century urbanization and development.

Introduction of the assessment by the High-level Independent Panel to Assess and Enhance the Effectiveness of UN-Habitat

10. The Secretary of Agrarian, Territorial and Urban Development of Mexico and Co-Chair of the Panel, Rosario Robles, explained the methodology used by the Panel in its assessment and noted the Secretary-General's request that the Panel be bold, transformative and reform-minded. She reiterated that the Panel's first recommendation was that UN-Habitat should be saved, stabilized and strengthened and that it should expand its normative work with a focus on "leaving no one behind". She emphasized that UN-Habitat should strengthen advocacy of urban issues, address informality and strengthen partnership building.

11. The President of United Cities and Local Governments, President of the South African Local Government Association and Co-Chair of the Panel, Mpho Parks Tau, commended his fellow Co-Chair and Panel members for their dedication and commitment. He noted the Panel's recommendation to set up a multi-agency coordinating mechanism, UN-Urban, which would complement the work of UN-Habitat, and the formalization of the role of local governments in UN-Habitat through the proposed Committee of Local Governments and the Committee of Stakeholders.

12. Both Co-Chairs stressed the need to shift to a territorial approach and to avoid the oversimplification of the rural/urban dichotomy. They stated that UN-Habitat had a significant role to play in promoting a sustainable urban agenda. They also spoke of the case for universality and greater participation at the local level.

III. Plenary debate

13. On 5 and 6 September, a plenary debate was held to discuss best practices, success stories and the recommendations contained in the report of the High-level Independent Panel. During the plenary debate, statements were made by the representatives of the following Member States and groups: Czechia, Ecuador (on behalf of the Group of 77 and China), South Africa, Barbados, Dominican Republic, Poland, Djibouti (on behalf of the Group of African States), Maldives (on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States), El Salvador (on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States), European Union, United States of America, Russian Federation, Singapore, Japan, Germany, India, China, Slovakia, Italy, Kenya, Argentina, Guatemala, Mexico, Cabo Verde, France, Albania, Colombia, Ethiopia, Philippines, Ecuador, Brazil, Spain, Uganda, Thailand, Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan, Zambia, Nepal, Republic of Korea, Togo, Serbia, Egypt, Senegal, Norway, Nigeria, Canada and Finland. Statements were also made by the observer for the Holy See, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), University College London, the Advisory Group on Gender Issues, the International Real Estate Federation, the Avina Foundation, the International Society of City and Regional Planners, the children and youth major group, and representatives of local governments, including the mayors of Des Moines, United States, Soria, Spain, and Penang, Malaysia, and the representative of the Office of the Mayor of Montreal, Canada.

A. General comments

14. The participants welcomed the New Urban Agenda and noted the renewed commitment of Member States to supporting its full implementation, follow-up and

review. They also stressed the need to increase synergies and linkages among the New Urban Agenda, the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Sendai Framework.

15. The participants appreciated the work of UN-Habitat to date and agreed on the need to save, stabilize and rapidly strengthen UN-Habitat. However, participants emphasized the increasing need for stronger governance, better financial management, higher efficiency, more transparency and enhanced accountability of UN-Habitat so that it could be fit for purpose to facilitate the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

16. The participants commended the High-level Independent Panel for its hard work, especially in the light of the short time frame given to it, and some participants welcomed the Panel's report as a sound basis from which to improve the functioning of UN-Habitat. The participants also thanked the Panel for identifying the critical challenges that affect the accountability, efficiency and effectiveness of UN-Habitat. Among the recommendations that were welcomed were the conceptual shift to a more territorial approach and the strengthening of the organization's ties with cities and local governments.

17. With regard to the remaining recommendations of the Panel, many participants were of the view that given the limited time available to the Panel, some recommendations warranted further discussion, including the proposed establishment of UN-Urban, the Policy Board, the Committee of Local Governments and the Committee of Stakeholders, as well as those proposals that could create a dichotomy between the normative and the operational work of UN-Habitat. The lack of clarity on the funding implications of some recommendations was also highlighted.

18. Some participants were of the view that the Panel had not been afforded sufficient time to comprehensively assess all aspects of paragraphs 172 and 173 of the New Urban Agenda and the implications of its recommendations. Participants thus advised caution in taking decisions on the basis of the report until the implications thereof had been fully understood, with the full participation and concurrence of Member States.

19. One representative expressed her concern arising from the low turnout at the meeting to discuss the Panel's report, especially at the ministerial level. She added that it was troubling that the recommendations of the Panel were to be discussed, but not the irregularities in and shortcomings of UN-Habitat that the Panel had found. Others were concerned by the lack of data that informed the Panel's report, citing the insufficient number of respondents, responses, sites visited and literature consulted. Another representative was of the view that the Panel had made recommendations beyond its remit, particularly in proposing the creation of additional bodies.

20. One representative noted that the reform of UN-Habitat should be evolutionary, not revolutionary, and that the focus should be on improving the work of existing structures, rather than creating parallel platforms and organizations. He recommended focusing on developing the accountability of UN-Habitat; another suggested that a comprehensive audit of the agency be conducted in a couple of years.

21. One representative stressed the importance of setting UN-Habitat on the best possible course and said that the focus should be on how best to guide it. She noted that the Panel had, overall, made good suggestions but that some of those ran counter to the organization's proposed reforms. She asked the Secretariat to provide

clarity on the agency's tasks and roles and emphasized the enormity of the task of implementing the New Urban Agenda.

22. A delegation stated that the Panel reflected the intensifying risks created by climate change and natural disasters to small island developing States and suggested that those concerns be addressed.

B. UN-Urban

23. The recommendations relating to the creation of UN-Urban gave rise to much discussion. The representatives posed questions with regard to the budget and oversight of the proposed UN-Urban and expressed their reservations with regard to its creation, noting that it would lead to the centralization, rather than the decentralization, of functions in New York, which was not consistent with efforts to ensure that the United Nations was fit for purpose in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. They believed that the establishment of UN-Urban would weaken UN-Habitat and create confusion and overlap between its role and that of UN-Habitat. They stressed that the institutional, normative and operational capacity of UN-Habitat should be used as the starting point for any such coordination mechanism. Some participants indicated that such a coordination mechanism would not be necessary if all United Nations system organizations were aligned in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. One representative suggested that UN-Urban, if found to be feasible, should thus be co-located, if not merged, with UN-Habitat.

24. Representatives felt that UN-Urban was not analogous to UN-Water, because the latter had been created in the absence of an entity for the preservation and sustainable use of water resources within the United Nations system, whereas an entity on urbanization was already in place, namely, UN-Habitat. Another delegation pointed out that UN-Water was not a good example to follow, since it had been described as an ineffective mechanism. It was also noted that the proposed creation of UN-Cities at Habitat III, which was a similar idea to UN-Urban, had already been raised and rejected by Member States.

25. Instead of creating UN-Urban, some representatives proposed that existing mechanisms, such as the New York office of UN-Habitat be strengthened, and that the office could fulfil a coordinating function between UN-Habitat and United Nations entities. One representative proposed that the United Nations Development Group or the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination could be tapped as a forum for coordination on sustainable urbanization. One speaker suggested that, rather than creating new entities, the focus should be on establishing clear, well-defined guidelines on coordination among United Nations entities, especially during crisis situations.

26. Nevertheless, participants all agreed on the need to strengthen coordination and coherence across the United Nations system and other development partners in implementing the New Urban Agenda.

C. Governance of UN-Habitat

27. With regard to the governance structure proposed by the Panel, the participants indicated that more reflection was needed. Several representatives were of the view that the proposed governance structure was complicated, inefficient and expensive and that it did not contribute to the strengthening of UN-Habitat.

28. The proposal to introduce universal membership for UN-Habitat through the creation of an Urban Assembly was viewed positively by some Member States. It was thought that the measure would increase the organization's effectiveness and efficiency, as well as lead to more open, participatory and transparent proceedings. However, some speakers were of the view that it would have negative consequences, such as higher costs and more bureaucracy, among others. Still, others suggested that the participation of the current members of the Governing Council should first be ensured before universal membership could be discussed. Several representatives added that the Governing Council should be strengthened, with some noting the absence of recommendations to increase the frequency of meetings of the Governing Council from the Panel's report, and others suggesting that a major forum be held on an annual basis. Other representatives supported the proposal for greater involvement on the part of local authorities and other stakeholders in the governance of the organization. One speaker, although supporting the idea of creating an Urban Assembly with universal membership, did not agree that the Assembly should meet in Nairobi and New York, suggesting instead that it should meet only in Nairobi.

29. Another view was expressed that the Governing Council should be strengthened and the proposed creation of the Policy Board should be analysed in greater detail. Some delegations welcomed the proposal to establish a Policy Board, while others were against it. Several participants requested clarity on the relationships between the proposed bodies, and the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed elements, including universal membership, the Policy Board and the Committee of Permanent Representatives. They would welcome assurance of the consistency of the proposed changes with the overall reform of the United Nations development system. Some representatives suggested that one option to consider was to establish an effective steering mechanism with a leaner organizational structure, such as an Executive Board or Board of Directors similar to those of other funds and programmes. One delegation expressed the view that, while the effectiveness of UN-Habitat and its accountability to Member States should be enhanced, an increase in bureaucracy should be avoided.

30. Some delegations welcomed the recommendation of the Panel to ensure a stronger UN-Habitat staff presence, especially of senior-level staff, in New York to improve coordination and build closer relationships with the United Nations entities located there. One delegation was, however, unclear as to how that measure would in fact enhance coordination. One delegation did not support the proposal to reinforce the staff of UN-Habitat in New York or Nairobi, given the financial challenges that UN-Habitat faced.

31. One speaker supported the proposal to relocate the UN-Habitat regional offices to cities in which regional economic commissions were located. Some speakers, however, could not see the benefits thereof and requested that the proposal receive further consideration. One delegate stressed the need to strengthen the collaboration between the country and liaison offices of UN-Habitat and other regional offices of United Nations entities. One speaker proposed setting up a regional office of UN-Habitat in the region of the Balkans.

32. One speaker stated that the future of UN-Habitat depended on good leadership and called upon the Secretary-General and Member States to contribute to the process of finding the most qualified person to lead the organization in January 2018.

D. Mandate of UN-Habitat

33. The Panel's recommendations relating to the normative and operational work of UN-Habitat, including the proposed cap on earmarked funding that went to operational work, were met with mixed views. Some representatives welcomed the emphasis on renewing the commitment of UN-Habitat to its normative mission and noted that decreased contributions had caused the agency to concentrate on operational work financed by earmarked contributions. Some representatives agreed with the proposal to limit the funding earmarked for operational work and, beyond that, advocated greater transparency on the part of Member States with regard to the use of such funding.

34. However, other representatives stressed that operational activities were a vital part of the overall UN-Habitat mandate, in the sense that its normative functions could be fulfilled only with a clear understanding of the realities on the ground. They were of the view that the operational work of UN-Habitat was important in identifying and preparing context-specific solutions to matters related to human settlements and that a cap on earmarked funding that went to operational work would thus not be ideal.

35. One delegation believed that to restrict the organization to normative work would drastically reduce its ability to respond to needs at the national and local levels. Therefore, UN-Habitat should focus on both normative and operational work in response to national demand. Another delegation suggested that, rather than the proposed cap, a more strategic and programmatic approach to the management of projects under earmarked funds should be taken to maximize their normative value and contributions.

36. One speaker supported the recommendation that the primary focus of UN-Habitat should be on urban planning and design, national urban policies, informality and exclusion. Another speaker stressed that housing, land, slum upgrading and municipal finance should not be left out. Given that many local governments in developing countries were in dire need of revenue at the local and national levels, it was prudent to allow UN-Habitat to continue to work on municipal finance as part of the urban economy.

37. Participants also identified the following tasks that should form part of the organization's mandate: follow-up and review of the implementation of the New Urban Agenda; inter-agency coordination; knowledge generation and dissemination; advocacy and capacity-building; and data collection and analysis.

E. UN-Habitat financial capacity and partnerships

38. Speakers agreed that the lack of stable and predictable funding of UN-Habitat was an obstacle to the organization's fulfilment of its mandate. The representatives agreed that an urgent financial rescue package from the United Nations regular budget was needed to save, stabilize and rapidly strengthen UN-Habitat. They also agreed that Member States needed to work on ensuring the sustainability and predictability of their voluntary contributions to UN-Habitat and increasing allocations to UN-Habitat from the United Nations budget. However, while participants agreed on the need for innovative funding sources, increased regular funding and voluntary contributions, they were wary of any increased burden on developing countries and asked the Panel for more information in that regard.

39. Support was voiced for the Panel's call to increase the funding of the organization. One delegation suggested that enlarging the donor base could be

examined with a view to mobilizing resources and, in that regard, welcomed the Panel's recommendation to establish a strategic financing plan. It also suggested examining how to involve State and non-State actors, including the private sector and local collectives, without undermining the central role of Governments. Another delegation welcomed the recommendation to explore new funding modalities to secure contributions from Member States, noting, in that regard, the establishment of the Group of Friends of Sustainable Development Goals Finance, which sought to unlock new sources of financing. One representative supported establishing a group of Member States to develop proposals for the funding of the core UN-Habitat requirements prior to the consideration of the General Assembly resolution on strengthening UN-Habitat.

40. The growing sentiment that UN-Habitat must gain the increased confidence of Member States, and that changes in that direction must be fully aligned and consistent with the wider effort to reform the whole United Nations development system was echoed by some delegations. It was stressed, in that context, that UN-Habitat must be able to articulate its comparative advantage in relation to other United Nations entities and offer concrete visions of how to collaborate with those entities. UN-Habitat should redouble its internal reform efforts to increase efficiency and transparency by improving documentation, reporting and project approval and management processes.

41. One speaker believed that there was no need to create a Global Trust Fund, which in her view would fragment the UN-Habitat structure.

42. One speaker stressed that, in the light of the dire need for financial resources of small island developing States, it was important that official development assistance commitments be fully met and made available to strengthen UN-Habitat and other entities.

43. The speakers welcomed the recommendations to strengthen the relationships of UN-Habitat with local governments, civil society and the private sector, as well as with other United Nations entities. However, one speaker stressed the need to further discuss the recommendation on creating the Committee of Stakeholders.

F. Best practices and success stories

44. Several Member States shared best practices, success stories and the challenges faced in their countries in relation to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. Many noted the adoption of urban plans, strategies, policies and legislation as part of their implementation efforts. One delegation drew attention to the threat posed by terrorism to urban development, which should be monitored by UN-Habitat. Another delegation cited poverty, investment gaps and weak technical capacity as the major challenges faced by its country in implementing the New Urban Agenda. It stressed that silo and one-size-fits-all approaches could only harm the country's already poor urban infrastructure and services.

45. Other speakers said that they were already working towards the vision of the New Urban Agenda, as reflected in their adoption of region- and country-specific urban agendas and related legislation. With a view to jointly promoting sustainable urban development with global partners, they suggested addressing urban inequality, while focusing on the specific needs of persons and groups in marginalized and vulnerable situations. Underlining that a significant change to policymaking within and for urban areas was required, they called for a renewed commitment to strengthening the capacity of subnational and local governments in all aspects of governance.

46. Several representatives emphasized that sustainable urban development was an important element of the 2030 Agenda and identified the need to plan the size and layout of cities, as well as to improve infrastructure. Participants also stressed the need for a human rights-based approach, including the right to development and a gender perspective, to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

G. Observers and stakeholders

47. The observer for the Holy See stressed that many challenges facing the family could be exacerbated in the context of the metropolis and that in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, every effort should be exerted to ensure that families enjoyed their fundamental rights. He said that there was a need to create and protect community spaces, visual landmarks and urban landscapes that facilitated in the urban dwellers a sense of belonging within a city.

48. A representative of ICRC welcomed the Panel's recognition of the increasingly urban nature of armed conflict and the profound effect that the destruction of civilian infrastructure had on a city's development agenda and on the provision of basic services. The New Urban Agenda must support contemporary urban planning and provision of services which were adapted to armed conflicts and crises, and reduce the effects of forced displacement in urban contexts.

49. A representative of IFRC welcomed the Panel's acknowledgement of the complex interlinkages between poverty, inequality, exclusion and the urbanization of disasters and crises. IFRC also welcomed the Panel's suggestion that the links between development and humanitarian work deserved increased attention, stressing that local authorities and communities must be at the centre of efforts to prevent, mitigate, respond to and recover from exceptional or everyday shocks and stresses.

50. Representatives of local authorities highlighted that local governments were essential to supporting the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Agenda. The Mayor of Soria stressed the need to mainstream the efforts of the United Nations to ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals could be achieved. The Mayor of Des Moines invited the Secretary-General to include in his reform proposals a chapter dedicated to the engagement of stakeholders in the United Nations. The Mayor of Penang called for not only greater clout to be given to local governments but also the transfer of power to extend to citizens. She also underlined the need to embrace gender mainstreaming in local government. The representative of the Office of the Mayor of Montreal, Canada, emphasized the importance of integrating the New Urban Agenda into the agenda of the United Nations in a cross-cutting way, and of building partnerships among national Governments, local authorities and cities in implementing the New Urban Agenda.

51. A representative of the Coordinator of the Advisory Group on Gender Issues underscored the need to listen to women's voices and to meaningfully include them in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Agenda. However, this also needed to extend to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community and to migrants, refugees, older persons and indigenous peoples.

52. A representative of the International Real Estate Federation highlighted the City Prosperity Initiative, which had been developed by UN-Habitat to monitor the implementation of the New Urban Agenda at the local level, as a very useful tool. She was convinced that businesses and industries would prove to be essential partners in defining initiatives and providing solid positive results, as well as in marketing the sustainable development strategy, thereby increasing funding.

53. A representative of University College London said that urban science was in need of capacity-building and suggested the establishment of a mechanism for science-policy interaction.

54. A representative of the Avina Foundation said that the New Urban Agenda provided a unique opportunity to promote more integrated engagement of philanthropic agencies in the urban development process. Foundations had the capacity to develop innovative models for piloting solutions, to share best practices and to advocate better public policies. Coordination efforts needed to be strengthened and linked with funding mechanisms, building on the experience of other financing methods within the United Nations system.

55. A representative of the International Society of City and Regional Planners said that human settlement and urban development professionals advocated a new global urban deal and new alliances for cities. While recognizing the value of the city prosperity index, they also emphasized the role of building with human and social capital for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. They called for the World Urban Forum to become a global arena for urban development stakeholders.

56. A representative of the children and youth major group proposed the creation of an inter-agency task team on sustainable urban development, co-chaired by UN-Habitat and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, to bring United Nations entities together to avoid silos and enhance effectiveness. She expressed serious concerns about the composition of the Committee of Stakeholders, noting that simply making reference to stakeholders did not guarantee an institutional space and rights-based participation. UN-Habitat should facilitate a framework to regulate and monitor the impact of the private sector on human rights, environmental protection and social progress.

IV. Panel discussions

Panel 1: The positioning of UN-Habitat in the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda: the normative and operational mandate of UN-Habitat and its work with governments and stakeholders

57. The first interactive panel focused on the normative and operational mandate of UN-Habitat and its work with governments and stakeholders. The discussion was moderated by the Executive Vice-President and Managing Director of the World Resources Institute, Manish Bapna. The panel was composed of the following members of the High-level Independent Panel: the Co-Chair of the Panel, Rosario Robles; the former Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the United Nations, František Ružička; and Ponsto S.M. Sekatle, Member of Parliament for Qacha's Nek Constituency of Lesotho.

58. One of the panellists elaborated on the proposed shift to a territorial approach raised in the report of the Panel. She noted that the territorial approach pertained to the whole of the "territory" and not only to urban or rural areas, adding that such an approach involved various levels of governance.

59. The panel noted the importance of the normative work of UN-Habitat, and of linking the normative and operational aspects. It was pointed out that normative work should drive the organization's activities, and that norms and standards, in turn, came out of lessons learned from the organization's operational work. It was thus important to improve the quality of both aspects.

60. One panellist added that the organization's mandate needed to be expanded to take into account the growth of metropolitan areas. She stressed that UN-Habitat must change from being reactionary to being proactive and that UN-Habitat must be ready with proposals regarding the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 11. However, that did not mean neglecting the operational aspect of its work.

61. Another panellist said that the New Urban Agenda would address the problems of urbanization, including congestion and slums in urban areas. The Panel was of the view, however, that UN-Habitat could not be the sole focal point of the Agenda. Given the Agenda's transversal nature, it needed to be integrated into the work of the United Nations system. In view of the support provided by UN-Habitat to Member States, United Nations agencies and other stakeholders through guidance and tools in this field, the Panel saw UN-Habitat as playing a leadership role in urban planning, decentralization and governance, in particular in addressing the needs of vulnerable groups in urban areas and informality.

62. During the interactive discussion, the representatives of the following Member States raised questions and made comments: Mexico, United States of America, India and Russian Federation.

63. One representative commended the Panel for the proposed shift to a metropolitan approach, one that could lead the discussion at the local and other levels in implementing the sustainable development agenda. He also commended the Panel for the cross-cutting nature of its work, which broke silos. In response, one panellist said that, while no silos had yet been broken, the Panel would continue to encourage horizontal communication within and between United Nations system organizations.

64. A representative expressed her country's agreement with much of the report but requested clarification on the specific tasks, roles and responsibilities of UN-Habitat, adding that the implementation of the New Urban Agenda was too big a task for any single entity. She added that the agency's operational and normative work should be clearly linked and recommended that it continue its successful work in bringing together national and local governments and civil society.

65. A participant said that the normative and operational work of UN-Habitat should be complementary and synergistic. He also said that the increasing diversity in cities should be captured, incorporated into future policy and shared with other countries. He acknowledged the need for a territorial approach.

66. A representative expressed his country's agreement with the conclusion of the Panel on the need for local authorities to have greater responsibility. He said, however, that it was not clear how that objective would be achieved, emphasizing that UN-Habitat should work with representatives of national authorities. Its task, he said, was to create favourable conditions for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. In response, one panellist said that the decision to allocate resources and authority to local governments depended on each country. The United Nations sought to be inclusive and to work with other stakeholders. UN-Habitat, for its part, worked with States at the national level and, informally, with local governments. She added that coordination at the local level should be part of the formal structure, given that legislation and planning were conducted at that level.

67. Questions were raised by representatives of civil society on the tools and resources for providing normative guidance to States, on how UN-Habitat could facilitate the empowerment of local governments in implementing the New Urban Agenda and on how the relationship between States and local governments could be developed to that end.

68. One panellist said that local governments should be empowered, and emphasized the need for mechanisms for their participation in the United Nations system, as well as for greater citizen participation.

69. Another panellist said that the Panel had been guided by the role of UN-Habitat as an intergovernmental organization, as well as by inclusivity and diversity. While the Panel respected the role of national Governments, a platform for the active participation and sharing of experiences of local authorities and cities needed to be created. The normative approach was not "one size fits all", he said, but rather needed to take diversity into consideration.

Panel 2: The positioning of UN-Habitat in the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda: the governance structure and financial capability of UN-Habitat

70. The second interactive panel focused on the governance structure and financial capability of UN-Habitat. The discussion was moderated by Manish Bapna. The panel was composed of the following members of the High-level Independent Panel: the Co-Chair of the Panel Mpho Parks Tau; the Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations, Dian Triansyah Djani; architect, urban designer and planner and founding member of the Congress for New Urbanism, Peter Calthorpe; and the Founder and Director of the Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centres, Sheela Patel.

71. The members of the panel explained how the High-level Independent Panel had sought to create a governance structure of UN-Habitat that would enhance the New Urban Agenda. One panellist noted that, contrary to some criticisms made following the issuance of the report, the proposed structure was not overly complex. Rather, it provided a very simple line from the General Assembly to the Policy Board, the addition of which had been recommended to ensure the integration of all interested parties into the activities of UN-Habitat. The Committee of Permanent Representatives remained in place, enabling Member States to interact directly with the organization.

72. The panellists highlighted the Panel's proposal to introduce universal membership for UN-Habitat, which, they explained, would enhance transparency and communication. It would also promote a sense of ownership and belonging among countries, which would, it was hoped, lead to an increase in contributions. One panellist noted that the introduction of universal membership in the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) had led to an increase in earmarked contributions.

73. During the interactive discussion, the representatives of the following Member States raised questions and made comments: United States of America, Colombia, Russia Federation, Finland, Botswana and Ethiopia.

74. One representative was of the view that universal membership would further dilute, rather than strengthen, the organization. She asked whether the increase in contributions for UNEP actually correlated with the introduction of universal membership. Another representative, while expressing support for the Programme's universalization, noted that the shift to universal membership in UNEP had revealed a number of challenges.

75. Regarding the creation of UN-Urban, a representative was of the view that the existing structure of UN-Habitat should be improved instead of creating parallel governance structures. Another representative, who was also of the view that the creation of a new coordinating structure might not be the best way forward,

suggested that a comparative analysis be conducted to identify ways to strengthen inter-agency coordination within existing structures. A delegation requested clarification with regard to the relationship envisaged between UN-Urban and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and asked whether the panel had considered the example of the Environment Management Group under UNEP. A delegation asked the reason, if the purpose was to enhance coordination, for the proposal to establish UN-Urban in New York rather than in Nairobi.

76. The panellists explained that UN-Urban was intended not as a competitor or replacement entity but as a coordinator; UN-Habitat would remain as the primary operational entity. An entity located in New York would be able to coordinate quickly and easily with other United Nations entities, given that most of them had a presence in New York.

77. In the light of the dire need for resources and the limited funding available, one panellist noted that UN-Habitat needed to attract continued voluntary contributions. Increasing the transparency and predictability of the organization could increase the confidence of its stakeholders. The High-level Independent Panel had therefore proposed a cap on the amount of core funds spent on staffing and other administrative costs and recommended that a limit be set for the earmarked funding from Member States that went to operational work.

78. One panellist noted that urbanism could offer some of the most cost-effective means of solving multiple problems, as one strategy could address many issues. If that could be made clear, people would be willing to invest. Financing and consensus were vital to change, and consensus came about when many different actors saw an advantage for their interests. With universal membership and a coordinating entity such as UN-Urban, funding could be drawn not only from Member States but also from foundations around the world.

79. Another panellist stressed the need to have a better understanding of the challenges and complexity created by urbanization at present, which would help to reduce future costs. She highlighted the potential to produce new forms of large investments with the involvement of many people, noting that the United Nations had the opportunity to introduce protocols by which consensus could be reached in that regard.

Panel 3: Implementing the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals: the role of the United Nations system

80. The third interactive panel focused on the role of the United Nations system in implementing the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The discussion was moderated by the Executive Director of Policy, United Nations Foundation, Min Thu Pham. The panel was composed of: the Executive Director of the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), Grete Faremo; the Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Thomas Gass; the Assistant Administrator and Director of the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Magdy Martínez-Soliman; the Deputy Executive Director of UN-Habitat, Aisa Dacyira; the Senior Vice President for the 2030 Development Agenda, United Nations Relations and Partnerships, World Bank Group, Mahmoud Mohieldin; and the Deputy Director of the New York office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Grainne O'Hara.

81. The panel members began by outlining the individual roles of their organizations in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. UNDP contributed to local development and governance by working to increase the capacities of local administrations to deliver services, promote a vibrant local economy, generate jobs and ensure legitimate local elections. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs provided analytics, statistics and projections on urbanization and played an important role in supporting Member States in the 2030 Agenda intergovernmental review process. The World Bank Group focused on identifying financing gaps, developing policy frameworks and providing adequate data, technical assistance and capacity-building. The role of UNOPS was to build infrastructure by engaging local contractors and labour. UNHCR had a role to play in the development aspects of the New Urban Agenda, in particular to respond to the new realities of displacement. Together with the World Bank and UNDP, UN-Habitat was developing a trust fund to support the financing of urbanization.

82. One panellist said that urbanization should be considered as a tool to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and that the New Urban Agenda was a tool for achieving inclusive, safe and sustainable development. The United Nations should not only save lives but also sow the seeds to enable humanitarian response to safely transition to development initiatives, which required a coordinated approach across agencies. Objective analytical and technical expertise should be shared with Member States to identify problems in cities and how best to deal with them, while policies should be put in place to unleash the potential of cities.

83. It was noted that decisions on infrastructure had long-term ramifications. Solid infrastructure was essential to growth and resilience, and investment therein, although it might initially be expensive, would make lifelong costs lower and ensure less loss of life. In the light of protracted refugee situations, development strategies needed to be employed at the beginning of a crisis.

84. With regard to cooperation and coordination, one panellist recommended that the United Nations system look to cities and urban settlements for inspiration on how to work in an interconnected way and implement commitments at the local level. Another panellist stressed that the issue of municipal finances must be dealt with correctly, noting that the World Bank Group had identified 19 possible revenue sources for municipalities, although only 2 were typically used. The importance of public procurement in extending sustainable development was also emphasized. One panellist encouraged engagement with the private sector to be further explored, especially given that many private investors had made a strong commitment to a sustainable future.

85. A representative of the International Organization for Migration stressed that the New Urban Agenda recognized migrants and refugees as part of the city and treated them all as rights holders regardless of their migratory status. A representative of the World Food Programme (WFP) said that WFP was to launch a new urban policy designed to strengthen partnerships. A representative of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) noted that UNODC, together with UN-Habitat and the Government of Canada, had recently organized an expert group meeting to address the issues of corruption, justice, urban crime and security in cities. A representative of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women called for bold gender mainstreaming efforts at the national and local levels in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda.

86. One delegate cited the Integrated Urban Development Framework, which brought together local governments and the government agencies responsible for

transport, water and urban planning, as a positive example of coordination in her country. She asked why the relevant agencies of the United Nations system, such as UNEP and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, were not similarly present in a coordinated fashion on the ground.

87. The moderator asked the panel members whether the current model for United Nations country teams was fit for purpose in terms of achieving the New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Agenda and how best to strengthen synergies across the United Nations system.

88. Several panellists noted the need to define a common objective to improve coordination and to engage directly with local actors to find solutions. One panellist warned against insisting on one rigid governance mechanism. Another panellist was of the view that the United Nations should demonstrate greater transparency and accountability in its coordination efforts and that it should improve its role as an adviser to Member States. Another view was expressed that bringing cities and urban settlements to the centre of the United Nations agenda must form the purpose of the coordination mechanism to be established at the global level. One panellist noted that the New Urban Agenda clarified the roles of national and local governments, whereby national urban policies must support urban planning at the city level and local governments must be able to negotiate strategically with national Governments.

Panel 4: Implementing the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals: the role of multi-stakeholder collaboration

89. The fourth interactive panel focused on the role of multi-stakeholder collaboration in implementing the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The discussion was moderated by the Chef de Cabinet of the Office of the President of the General Assembly, Tomas Anker Christensen. The panel was composed of the following representatives of local government and stakeholders: the Mayor of Madrid, Manuela Carmena; the President of the General Assembly of Partners, Eugenie Birch; the Director of the Indian Institute for Human Settlements, Aromar Revi; the Cities Sector Global Leader of PricewaterhouseCoopers and member of the Global Future Council on Cities of the World Economic Forum, Hazem Galal; the Senior Vice-President of Marketing, Communications and Public Affairs of the Rockwool Group, Mirella Vitale; and the Executive Director of the Citizen Association for Human Rights of Argentina, María José Lubertino.

90. The panellists began by stating the importance of stakeholder participation and collaboration in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. They added that partnerships could contribute substantially to setting policy and finding solutions with a view to sustainable urbanization.

91. They noted the centrality of implementation and the challenges thereto, with one panellist calling it a "trillion-dollar agenda". He added that implementation would rest on citizens, enterprises and local and national governments. UN-Habitat was no longer the only organization implementing Sustainable Development Goal 11, among others; what was required was integrated implementation at the local level with the power of national Governments. This required a new way of working for the United Nations, as well as new fiscal arrangements. With regard to public-private partnerships, another panellist added that the private sector should be involved earlier in the planning process. Several panellists spoke of the need to leverage the efficiency and knowledge of the private sector, and another panellist noted the role of mayors as representatives of citizens who spoke on their behalf.

92. In the ensuing discussion, several representatives noted the importance of incorporating a gender perspective into urbanization and of women's participation in associations to ensure that gender-related concerns were brought to the fore. They stressed that the participation of women and civil society was vital.

93. A representative of local government was of the view that the local population also needed to be a partner in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

94. Another representative of civil society recognized the role of persons with disabilities as not only recipients of services but also significant contributors to the implementation of the Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. He added that this was an opportune time to transform the mindset and promote inclusion. In response, one panellist spoke of the change in infrastructure and mentality regarding accessibility for persons with disabilities in Sochi, Russian Federation, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in preparation for the Olympic Games. He said, however, that a major event was not necessary for such a change, adding that accessibility should be designed at the outset.

95. During the interactive discussion, the representatives of the following Member States raised questions and made comments: Singapore, Qatar, Philippines and Dominican Republic.

96. A representative described the partnership between his country and UN-Habitat to implement capacity development programmes in other countries, with a view to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 11.

97. Another representative described the challenges experienced by his country in implementing the New Urban Agenda and spoke of the activities of the Red Crescent Society in his country, an organization that worked directly with communities.

98. A participant described his country's experience during Typhoon Haiyan, which showed the need for collaboration between national and local governments.

99. A delegation spoke about the "culture of the city" and the "right to the city", asking how they were to be integrated in planning processes. One panellist responded that those concepts were not yet included in the legal architecture and that UN-Habitat played a crucial role in that regard.

100. A representative of civil society stressed that young people should be included in discussions and asked how they were being trained to become agents of change.

101. In response to the questions and comments, the panellists noted that all voices underlined the necessity of multi-stakeholder platforms, breaking down silos and bringing people together so that their interests were represented. One panellist said that, in the United Nations context, reform of UN-Habitat was needed, as was reform of the United Nations development system. While acknowledging the importance of partnerships between multiple levels of government, he raised the question of sharing capacities and finances and political representation.

102. One panellist said that it was important for the United Nations to create a space for dialogue and exchange, a mechanism that allowed all stakeholders to work together. Nevertheless, the existing mechanisms were still relevant, she said, citing the example of international human rights treaties and the need for States to ratify them.

V. Closing segment

103. In his closing remarks, the President of the General Assembly said that it was clear from the discussions that Member States were united in ensuring an effective and efficient contribution from UN-Habitat and the overall United Nations system to the advancement of sustainable urbanization. It was also clear, however, that a number of the recommendations contained in the Panel's report would require further discussion and consideration. Noting that the second year of the Sustainable Development Goals was nearing its end and that Member States and stakeholders required the support of the United Nations in their implementation efforts, he encouraged everyone to proceed in a spirit of inclusiveness and universality of purpose and to work together to generate the consensus required to keep the momentum going.

VI. Side events

104. Two side events were organized on the margins of the meeting. The President of the General Assembly hosted a lunch discussion for mayors from around the world, with a focus on the role of cities in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda.

105. The Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments and the General Assembly of Partners organized a stakeholder consultation on the report of the High-level Independent Panel.